

Excerpts from *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli – and example of Humanism

In What Way Faith Should Be Kept By Princes

Everybody knows how laudable it is in a prince to keep this faith and to be an honest man and not a trickster. Nevertheless, the experience of our times shows that the princes who have done great things are the ones who have taken little account of their promises and who have known how to addle the brains of men with craft. In the end they have conquered those who have put their reliance on good faith.

You must realize, then, that there are two ways to fight. In one kind the laws are used, in the other, force. The first is suitable to man, the second to animals. But because the first often falls short, one has to turn to the second. Hence a prince must know perfectly how to act like a beast and like a man. This truth was covertly taught to princes by ancient authors, who write that Achilles and many other ancient princes were turned over for their upbringing to Chiron the centaur, that he might keep them under his tuition. To have as teacher one who is half beast and half man means nothing else than that a prince needs to know how to use the qualities of both creatures. The one without the other will not last long.

Since, then, it is necessary for a prince to understand how to make good use of the conduct of the animals, he should select among them the fox and the lion, because the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot protect himself from the wolves. So the prince needs to be a fox that he may know how to deal with traps, and a lion that he may frighten the wolves. Those who act like the lion alone do not understand their business. A prudent ruler, therefore, cannot and should not observe faith when such observance is to his disadvantage and the causes that made him give his promise have vanished. If men were all good, this advice would not be good, but since men are wicked and do not keep their promises to you, you likewise do not have to keep yours to them. Lawful reasons to excuse his failure to keep them will never be lacking to a prince. It would be possible to give innumerable modern examples of this and to show many treaties and promises that have been made null and void by the faithlessness of princes. And the prince who has best known how to act as a fox has come out best. But one who has this capacity must understand how to keep it covered, and be a skillful pretender and dissembler. Men are so simple and so subject to present needs that he who deceives in this way will always find those who will let themselves be deceived.

I do not wish to keep still about one of the recent instances. Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, father of Cesare Borgia; pope from 1492-1503) did nothing else than deceive men, and had no other intention; yet he always found a subject to work on. There never was a man more effective in swearing that things were true, and the greater the oaths with which he made a promise, the less he observed it. Nonetheless, his deceptions always succeeded to his wish, because he thoroughly understood this aspect of the world.

It is not necessary, then, for a prince really to have all the virtues mentioned above, but it is very necessary to seem to have them. I will even venture to say that they damage a prince who possesses them and always observes them, but if he seems to have them they are useful. I mean that he should seem compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest, and religious, and actually be so; but yet he should have his mind so trained that, when it is necessary not to practice these virtues, he can change to the opposite, and do it skillfully. It is to be understood that a prince, especially a new prince, cannot observe all the things because of which men are considered good, because he is often obliged, if he wishes to maintain his government, to act contrary to faith, contrary to charity, contrary to humanity, contrary to religion. It is

therefore necessary that he have a mind capable of turning in whatever direction the winds of fortune and the variations of affairs require, and, as I said above, that he should not depart from what is morally right, if he can observe it, but should know how to adopt what is bad, when he is obliged to.

A prince, then, should be very careful that there does not issue from his mouth anything that is not full of the above-mentioned five qualities. To those who see and hear him he should seem all compassion, all faith, all honest, all humanity, all religion. There is nothing more necessary to make a show of possessing than this last quality. For men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands; everybody is fitted to see, few to understand. Everybody sees what you appear to be; few make out what you really are. And these few do not dare to oppose the opinion of the many, who have the majesty of the state to confirm their view. In the actions of all men, and especially those of princes, where there is no court to which to appeal, people think of the outcome. A prince needs only to conquer and to maintain his position. The means he has used will always be judged honorable and will be praised by everybody, because the crowd is always caught by appearance and by the outcome of events, and the crowd is all there is in the world; there is no place for the few when the many have room enough. A certain prince of the present day (Ferdinand II, the “Catholic” king of Spain. In refraining from mentioning him, Machiavelli apparently had in mind the good relations existing between Spain and the House of Medici.), whom it is not good to name, preaches nothing else than peace and faith, and is wholly opposed to both of them, and both of them if he had observed them, would many times have taken from him either his reputation or his throne.”

Concerning Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether it is Better to be Loved than Feared

Upon this a question arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by nobility or greatness of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserved you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women.

[UTOPIAN VIEW OF RICHES, GOLD, AND JEWELS]

All things appear incredible to us, as they differ more or less from our own manners. Yet one who can judge aright will not wonder, that since their constitution differeth so materially from ours, their value of gold and silver also, should be measured by a very different standard. Having no use for money among themselves, but keeping it as a provision against events which seldom happen, and between which are generally long intervals, they value it no farther than it deserves, that is, in proportion to its use. Thus it is plain, they must prefer iron to either silver or gold. For we want iron nearly as much as fire and water, but nature hath marked out no use so essential for the other metals, that they may not easily be dispensed with. Man's folly hath enhanced the value of gold and silver because of their scarcity; whereas nature, like a kind parent, hath freely given us the best things, such as air, earth, and water, but hath hidden from us those which are vain and useless.

Were these metals to be laid-up in a tower, it would give birth to that foolish mistrust into which the people are apt to fall, and create suspicion that the prince and senate designed to sacrifice the public interest to their own advantage. Should they work them into vessels or other articles, they fear that the people might grow too fond of plate, and be unwilling to melt it again, if a war made it necessary....

They eat and drink from earthen ware or glass, which make an agreeable appearance though they be of little value; while their chamber-pots and close-stools are made of gold and silver; and this not only in their public halls, but in their private houses. Of the same metals they also make chains and fetters for their slaves; on some of whom, as a badge of infamy, they hang an ear-ring of gold, and make others wear a chain or a coronet of the same metal. And thus they take care, by all possible means, to render gold and silver of no esteem...

They find pearls on their coast, and diamonds and carbuncles on their rocks. They seek them not, but if they find them by chance, they polish them and give them to their children for ornaments, who delight in them during their childhood. But when they come to years of discretion, and see that none but children use such baubles, they lay them aside of their own accord; and would be as much ashamed to use them afterward, as grown children among us would be of their toys...

The Utopians wonder that any man should be so enamoured of the lustre of a jewel, when he can behold a star or the sun; or that he should value himself upon his cloth being made of a finer thread. For, however fine this thread, it was once the fleece of a sheep, which remained a sheep notwithstanding it wore it...

[UTOPIANS' LOVE OF LEARNING]

They are industrious, apt scholars, and cheerful and pleasant companions. None can endure more labour when it is necessary, but unless that be the case they love ease. Their pursuit of knowledge is indefatigable. When we had given them some hints of the learning and discipline of the Greeks (of whom alone we instructed them, for we knew there was

nothing among the Romans, except their historians and poets, that they would much esteem), it was strange to see with what avidity they set about learning that language. We read a little of it to them, rather in compliance with their importunity, than from any hope of their reaping much advantage by it. But after a very short trial, we found they made such progress, that our labour was likely to be much more successful than we could have expected. They learned to write the character and pronounce the language so well, had such quick apprehensions and faithful memories, and became so ready and correct in the use of it, that it would have been miraculous, had not the greater part of those we taught been men of extraordinary capacity, and of a proper age for instruction. They were most of them selected among the learned men, by their chief council; though some learned it of their own accord. In three years they became masters of the language, and could read the best Greek authors.

Indeed, I am inclined to think they learned the language more easily, from its having some analogy to their own. For I believe they were a colony of Greeks; and though their language more nearly resemble the Persian, they retain many names, both for their towns and magistrates, which are of Greek derivation. I happened to take out a large number of books, instead of merchandize, when I made my fourth voyage. For, so far from expecting to return so soon, I rather thought I should never return; and I gave them all my books, among which were many of Plato's and some of Aristotle's works... They highly esteem Plutarch, and were much taken with Lucian's wit, and his pleasant way of writing. Of the poets, they have Aristophanes, Homer, Euripides, and the Aldine edition of Sophocles; and of historians, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Herodian.

My companion, Apinatus, happened to take with him some of Hippocrates' works...which they hold in high esteem; for though no nation on earth needeth physic less than they do, yet none honoureth it more. They reckon this knowledge one of the pleasantest and most profitable parts of philosophy; as it searcheth the secrets of nature, is highly agreeable in the pursuit, and probably acceptable to the Author of our being... they imagine that an exact and curious observer who admireth his work, is far more acceptable to him than one of the herd, who, like a beast incapable of reason, looketh on this glorious scene with the eyes of a dull and unconcerned spectator.

Their minds thus filled with a love of learning, they are very ingenious in the discovery of all those arts which are necessary to its promotion. Two of these they owe to us, the manufacture of paper, and the art of printing...

[LAWS AND GOVERNMENT OF UTOPIA]

If a man aspire ambitiously to any office, he loseth it for certain. They live in loving discussion with each other, the magistrates never behaving either insolently or cruelly to the people. They affect rather to be called fathers, and by really being such, well merit the appellation. The people pay them all marks of honour, the more freely because none are exacted from them. The prince himself hath no distinction either of garments or a crown; a sheaf of corn only is carried before him, and a wax-light before the high-priest.

They have few laws and such is their constitution, they require not many. They much condemn other countries, whose laws, with the commentaries on them, swell so many

volumes; esteeming it unreasonable to oblige men to obey a body of laws so large and intricate, as not to be read and understood by every subject.

They have no lawyers among them. For they esteem them a class, whose profession it is to disguise matters, and to writhe the laws. Therefore they think it much better that every man should plead his own cause, and trust it to the judge, as elsewhere the client trusteth it to his counsellor. By this plan they avoid many delays, and find out the truth with more certainty. For after the parties have opened the merits of the cause without the artifices of lawyers, the judge examines the matter and supports the simplicity of those well-meaning persons whom otherwise the crafty would run down. And thus they avoid those evils which appear so remarkable in those countries which labour under a vast load of laws.

Every one of them is skilled in their law. It is a very short study, and the plainest meaning of which words are capable, is ever the sense of it. They argue thus. All laws are promulgated that every man may know his duty. Therefore the plainest construction of words is, what ought to be put upon them. A more refined exposition could not easily be comprehended, and would only make the laws useless to the greater part of mankind, especially to those who most need the guidance of them....

Some of their neighbours, who long ago, by the assistance of the Utopians, shook off the yoke of tyranny, being struck with the virtue they observed among them, have come to desire magistrates of them, some changing them yearly, others every five years. When they change them, it is with strong expressions of honour and esteem; and in this they seem to have hit upon a very good expedient for their own happiness and safety. Since the good or ill condition of a country dependeth so much on its magistrates, they could not have made a better choice than men whom no advantages can bias. Wealth is of no use to them, who must so soon return to their own country; and being strangers among them, no party interests can agitate them. When public judicatories are swayed by avarice or partiality, justice, the grand sinew of society, is lost.

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